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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: review of further implementation of the World Summit for Social Development and the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

Statement submitted by Christian Children's Fund, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd and Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; and Friedrich Ebert Foundation, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.5/2005/1.

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Introduction

We, international NGOs, many of whom are affiliated with the NGO Committee on Social Development, welcome this opportunity to participate in the 2005 review of the implementation of the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen.)

We recall that commitment #5 of the Copenhagen consensus binds governments to "full respect for human dignity and to achieve equality and equity between men and women" in all areas of social life. Additionally, commitment #1 under letter D also commits governments to "promoting equality and equity for all men and women." Commitment # 6 on universal and equitable education speaks compellingly of the need for priority to be given to education for women and girls.

Therefore we offer these comments on the current state of implementation followed by recommendations to governments that will foster needed progress on these issues.

Overview of Gender Concerns

We are happy to acknowledge that ten years after The Copenhagen Summit, women's status has advanced in many countries in areas of infant mortality rates, calorie consumption, school enrollment, literacy levels, access to health care, and political participation. Particular achievements such as the international acceptance of rape as a war crime and the promulgation of Security Council resolution 1325 are important milestones for women and girls.

Nevertheless, we sadly emphasize that "equality and equity between men and women" are remote realities across all areas of the world. Women and girls continue to be excluded in extreme and significant ways from basic rights and societal benefits. They are also excluded from essential forms of societal participation and are the most vulnerable to stress and deprivation. In some regions, notably, parts of Africa and Asia, women report that they are regarded as having no autonomy or dignity whatsoever and this shapes their own negative view of themselves and their impoverished life expectations.

Current Disparities in Gender Equality

In this era when economic globalization has become structurally embedded in societies, gender-based economic configurations are key to women's disempowerment. Poverty continues to be a feminized phenomenon. Women suffer disproportionately from the negative impacts of international finance models, trade liberalization, and the privatization of public social services. Women are more affected by macroeconomic instabilities than men.

Not only are women, as a group, excluded from the benefits of economic globalization but the widening gender digital gap show that many women and girls are at a high risk of exclusion from technological benefits that might otherwise have been expected to give them access to economic stability.

Social gaps in gender equality and equity persist in chronic forms of poverty and violence against women and girls in all parts of the world. Alarming and increasingly severe manifestations of gender inequality are seen in the phenomena of a rising demand for trafficked women and girls for sexual exploitation, the increasing rate of incidence of HIV/AIDS in women and girls, and the widespread suffering of women and girls in conflict situations and situations of military control. Such social gaps are under girded by the dominance of patriarchal structures that persist in devaluing women in relation to men. This contradicts the very foundation of universal Human Rights and the notion of people-centered

development that is essential to social development. Social attitudes require government supported critical review and revision even as governments enact laws and apply resources to ensure gender equality.

The implementation of universal education is one of the most essential areas for the Copenhagen review. Multiple UN and UNICEF studies have demonstrated that girl's education is the surest and fastest way of achieving social progress and eradicating poverty. Despite programs such as such as the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) and the World Bank Fast Track Initiative to accelerate gender equality in primary and secondary education, over 70 countries risk failure in achieving gender parity in education at these levels by 2005[1]. Education must be universally accessible comprehensive to support the value of human dignity.

Recommendations:

Therefore, in accord with these failures in implementation, and in accord with the continuing commitments that governments have made since Copenhagen, including the review of Beijing in 2000, the Monterrey Consensus of 2002, the ongoing work of the Financing for Development process, and, of course, the efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, we make the following policy recommendations for Gender Equality and Equity:

We call on governments to:

- Articulate, with the active participation of women from all sectors of society, a commitment to change the dominant patriarchal structures that underpin the issues noted above. Governments should sign and implement all international agreements relative to gender equality and publicize, within all sectors of national life, a priority for action toward gender equality.
- Integrate a coherent policy based on the centrality of universal human rights and the dignity of each person. Consultation of grassroots citizens ought to inform all policy development. Macroeconomic and social policies ought to contribute hand-in-hand to human dignity, gender equality, poverty eradication and sustainable development. We note that strong environmental policies that protect natural resources and provide clean and safe environments to women and their families are essential to person-centered development that supports gender equality and assures life for future generations. Guiding values that concentrate primarily on liberalization and privatization constrain social progress. They serve the benefit of some countries or groups of society to the exclusion and detriment of others, including women as a group. Values that guide macroeconomic policy towards people-centered development and social justice require behavior and action that is beneficial to all in society.
- Implement and evaluate existing and newly formed policies. Concrete objectives within national plans should have the human person clearly at the center of development goals. The well being of the human person must be the strongest indicator of progress. The principles and priorities of gender equality and equity (described in international agreements to which the governments are signatories) should ensure allocation of resources for these priorities, focus research to obtain disaggregated data, and ensure

[1] This figure is from the second edition of the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2003.

the participation of women in government ministries. All policies require regular evaluation to determine the progress towards the goals that they are meant to achieve. Such evaluation ought to include the participation of women most affected by gender inequality.

Finally, we affirm that NGOs are willing partners in these efforts to achieve gender equality and equity. NGOs have expertise and determination to assist in this effort. We call on governments to collaborate, substantially and effectively, with NGOs to achieve gender equality and equity for the good of all society.

This statement is endorsed and supported by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council:

Coalition against Trafficking in Women

Congregations of St. Joseph

Dominican Leadership Conference

Elizabeth Seton Federation

Franciscans International

International Association of Charities

International Association of Schools of Social Work

International Council of Jewish Women

International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres

International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation

School Sisters of Notre Dame

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries

Soroptimist International

VIVAT International

Zonta International